

PET TALES

Rescue me!

Are rescue groups, shelters too tough when placing pets?

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The day Ellen DeGeneres was weeping on her talk show over pet-rescue volunteers who took back a dog she'd given away, I was in the midst of adopting a dog from a different rescue group. And I was reminded, again, of two things:

- All rescue groups are different, in terms of philosophies and policies.
- Good contracts make good adoptions, but good people make better ones.

The day after the Ellen DeGeneres weep-fest, I was finalizing the adoption, including initialing a contract with a paragraph now jokingly called "The Ellen Clause." And no, I won't be giving this dog away without contacting the rescue group first. Because they explained the contract to me, and because I agreed to its terms. And because I know they're only trying to help.

An interview, contract-signing, donation and home-check later, the dog is now in his forever home — mine. But I know my easy adoption experience isn't universal, and I've heard many times from many people about how shelters and rescue groups make it too difficult for well-meaning families to adopt a pet.

How difficult? I've heard from people

who've been turned down by a shelter or rescue group because they have an unneutered pet in the home (even though the pet they're adopting is neutered and they aren't planning to breed any pets at all). People who've been turned down because they won't rule out declawing or won't swear to keep a cat inside. People who don't have fenced yards or those who live in apartments. And people, most notably in the case of the DeGeneres incident, who have children in the home.

Sometimes it does seem that some shelters and rescue groups try harder to rule out prospective homes for pets than to work with people to make an adoption possible, through education, say, or by working to find a pet better suited to a home with children.

Having run a breed rescue, I know that when placing a hard-luck pet there's a real desire to make the next placement a final one, and that means a by-the-book, perfect one. But it's also true that when I was doing rescue work, I broke my own rules all the time, and over the years some of the people who proved to be the best homes were those who didn't look at all appropriate on paper.

Why did I place pets with them? Because I listened to them, I heard what was in their hearts and took a chance. And because I know that life is full of chances, changes and risks, and even a perfect home may change down the line.

But there's change on the way. The growing "no-kill" movement is

changing the idea that a pet is better dead than placed in what appears to be a less-than-perfect home. And changing, too, is the idea that people are "bad" potential pet owners before being proven "good" by shelter or rescue group standards.

Next week, we'll introduce you to two pioneers who are changing the way we think about homeless pets, in a way that's good for both the animals and for the people who hope to adopt them.

The latest addition to my family, by the way, is Pippin, and I wasn't looking for another dog when he grabbed me by the heart and wouldn't let go.

He was found wandering in Central California with a broken belt around his neck, pulled from a county pound by German Shepherd Rescue of Northern California, and then spent a few months in foster care until something in his eyes told me he needed to be part of my family.

He's not all shepherd, though, and maybe it was that classic border collie eye of his that got my attention. No matter: I now have a young dog that I'm calling a German Sheddler-Brainy Collie mix, and he just couldn't be sweeter.

As for me, I couldn't be happier.

Do you have a shelter or rescue group experience, good or bad, that you'd like to share? Join the conversation on our PetConnection.com Web site. ■



Shelters and rescue groups have all kinds of policies, including those regarding children.

Pet of the Week



>>Spike
Spike (351825) is an affectionate and energetic two-year-old German shepherd/Lab mix. He was surrendered by an owner who had to move. Spike has been waiting quite a while for his new home and he hopes to find one soon.



>>Carlos
Carlos (378975) is a full-grown, one-year-old boy who looks like a mix between a dachshund and a German shepherd. He has a super sweet personality.



>>Lassie
Lassie (379883) is a mixed-breed, eight-month-old female. A landlord would not let her owner keep her. She is very affectionate and loves attention.



>>China
China (379616) is a two-year-old, poodle mix who was found running stray. She loves playing and cuddling and has irresistible brown eyes.

To adopt a pet

There are many dogs and cats available at Lee County Animal Services, 5600 Banner Drive, Fort Myers. Call 432-2083 or visit the agency's Web site at www.leelostpets.com. Adoption applications may be downloaded from the site or completed at the shelter, which is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Please use the animal's ID number when inquiring about it. The adoption fee is \$65 for dogs and \$50 for cats.

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